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Terrorists and freedom fighters

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Like all Holy Land tourists and pilgrims, vacationers in the Greek islands, commercial travelers, furloughed military, world-class hookers, Foreign Service personnel, itinerant journalists, airline employees, present and former hostages and other right-thinking Americans, President Reagan is opposed to terrorism.

Terrorists, the president said on April 23, 1983, are "cowardly, skulking barbarians," which is certainly strong language but does not seem to discourage the terrorists.

His reference was specifically to the terrorists who, five days earlier, had driven a truckload of explosives up to the United States Embassy in West Beirut and blown it up, killing themselves and 63 other persons, including 13 Americans and a staff of Palestinians and Lebanese vital to US intelligence operations in the Middle East.

That explosion came on the 208th anniversary of the midnight ride of Paul Revere, a member of a secret society deeply involved in an armed conspiracy against the government of Massachusetts and an adherent of a confederacy of lawyers, merchants, smugglers and speculators who had aroused the passions of the Boston mob and poor country folk against their lawful king.

There are about 850 million Moslems in the world, inhabiting strategic, oil-rich territories from the Philippines through Indonesia, Bangladesh, Iran and the Arab world beyond Gibraltar and, it seems, Detroit. Of these, only around 40 million are of the Shiite persuasion. Not all Shiites are terrorists or fundamentalists and not all are admirers of Ayatollah Khomeini, even in Iran, where most Shiites live.

Outside Iran, they are, characteristically, poor, powerless and regarded as eccentric and heretical by the majority Sunni of Islam. However, they constitute the largest single ethnic-sectarian group of the 17 recognized sects in Lebanon, making up more than 30 per-

cent of the population of that ravaged land.

Lebanon is a region. As a political state, it never has worked very well. It was invented by the British and the French when they cut up the carcass of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. Until 1975, it functioned as the major center of communications, finance and commerce between the Arab-Islamic world and the European-American world. The Shiite fundamentalists regard "Western" culture as degraded and polluting. They are cultural environmentalists. They have no First Amendment. They don't want any fast-food joints, barbecues or X-rated movies in their neighborhoods.

Now, to put some of this in perspective, let us return to the topic of terrorism.

In Nicaragua, there is terrorism in which indigenous dissident guerrillas are described by the president of the United States as comparable to, say, Paul Revere, despite plausible, corroborated accounts of atrocious misconduct. There is no mystery about whether or not this activity is state-sponsored or spontaneous. It is state-sponsored by the government of the United States.

In Afghanistan, there is also quite a lot of terrorism. Freedom fighters, inadequately armed by the American Central Intelligence Agency, practice terrorism against their lawful government and its Soviet masters with a ruthlessness provoked by the genocidal cruelty of that government and the Russians. Unlike the Nicaraguan contras, the heroic Afghan partisan warriors enjoy the support of both parties in the United States Congress. Some of them - you may not be quite ready for this - are Shiite Moslem fundamentalist terrorists.

If all of this perplexes you, do not despair. It obviously perplexes not only the president but also his advisers and publicists. It does not seem to perplex the Shiites.

A lot of people want President Reagan to ask Israel to release the rest of its Shiite hostages so that the Shiites will free their American captives. They are wrong.

The Shiites want the president

to put public pressure on Israel. If he does, and Israel complies, the Likud Party will join the Islamic fundamentalists in complaining that Israel is a US puppet. If the president applies public pressure and Israel resists, the Shiites expect, reasonably enough, that America will blame Israel.

Israel, we are told, intended to release its Shiite hostages anyway. Israel is getting \$4 billion a year in aid from the United States, which financed and tolerated Israel's 1982 search-and-destroy mission in Lebanon, which cost 20,000 lives, by Lebanese estimates. If Israel could see its way clear to helping with the release of the Americans without being asked, it would be kind of a nice gesture, don't you think?

Or do you think the United States and Israel ought to try to police the world with battleships and SWAT teams?

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